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ABSTRACT

This document is a course outline for an 18 week course in literature of and about Mexico designed to give community college students the experience of studying a variety of literary forms, such as the epic, the lyric, the short story and the novel, in a foreign and exotic setting such as Mexico. Further, the course is intended to help the student gain a broad, and in some areas, a deep understanding of the Mexican cultural experience, leading to an understanding of the Mexican consciousness. Course goals and general materials and activities are described in this outline as are the objectives, methods, and readings (in translation) for each unit comprising the course. Course units cover Mexican literature from the pre-Hispanic period through the modern era. An extensive bibliography listing alternative readings from which instructors may select is attached. (JDS)

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Literature of and about Mexico
Project Mexico
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JC 770 128

LITERATURE OF AND ABOUT MEXICO - ONE SEMESTER, 3 HOURS PER WEEK

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O.C.C.

I. Description of Course

This is a literature course in which readings will be selected from works written by Mexicans and other nationals and which reflect varying perceptions of the Mexican experience. The readings will cover the historical perspective of Mexico, starting with the pre-Columbian times, through the conquest, the colonial period, the period of independence, the revolution, and the modern period. The readings will be fiction, poetry and some historical/biographical prose selected to be representative of the Mexican ideas and themes of their period. The readings will all be in English translation.

II. Goals of the Course

One of the goals of this course is to give the students the experience of studying a variety of literary forms, such as the epic, the lyric, the short story and the novel, in a foreign and exotic setting such as Mexico. This setting will allow the student to view the forms and techniques with distance and objectivity. At the same time, the student will be able to see the presence and function of certain prototypical forms that occur in Anglo/American literature. The course will provide a fundamental experience in comparative literature.

A more important goal is that the student will gain a broad, and in some areas a deep understanding of the Mexican cultural experience. He will become acquainted and conversant with fundamental experiences that led to the formation of the Mexican consciousness. He will gain an understanding of the Mexican that will come as a result of the study of the humanistic literary aspects of several important historical periods of the people, such as the conquest, the colonization, the independence, the revolution and the struggles of modernization. This experience will result in the outcome that humanities studies endeavors to achieve, a universally sensitive individual. And in a more specific sense, the student will have a better understanding of the Latin American, in particular the Mexican.

III. The Student

This course is planned for a rather general community college student. It will serve as a valuable elective for the student who is majoring in the humanities or in the social sciences and who intends to transfer to another school for upper division work. It is also designed for the general interest student who may not have specific educational goals, but is interested in broadening his general educational background.

IV. Materials and Activities of the Course

The accompanying specific outline of the course and the attached bibliography list works that may be used as readings, but the teacher will find that there are a number of alternatives that may be selected and will achieve the listed objectives quite as successfully. He will find that there are a greater number of alternatives in some historical periods than in others, due to the greater or lesser attention given to Mexico by writers at different times. This circumstance is in itself an interesting part of the study. The teacher may also find his choices are limited by the availability of translations for certain works. In spite of this, there is a quite large number of works available in English to accomplish the goals of the course.

The activities and material of the course will fit into the general framework of a typical college literature course. The students will read assigned texts outside of class, and in class they will hear background lectures and will discuss the readings. The lectures will provide information that will place the readings in a historical and social context, as well as point out important technical features of the writings and biographical details of the authors and poets. The instructor should also supplement the readings and lectures with audio-visual materials exhibiting such things as the music, the art, the geography and the historical ruins of Mexico. Because this course is implicitly more than a verbal experience of Mexico, and since Mexico is such a (sensually) rich country, experiences that go beyond the printed word are important.

V. The Instructor

The person who teaches this course should be someone who has a deep and sensitive understanding of Mexico. If not Mexican-born himself, he should be someone who has traveled widely in Mexico, as well as someone who has studied a lot about Mexican history and culture. As in effective teaching of any subject, success can be measured by the degree to which the teacher gives of himself to his students. If the object is to teach an understanding and even a love of the subject matter to the student, the teacher must first possess that understanding and love himself.

VI. Course Outline

Weeks 1 & 2 - Pre-Hispanic Period

The readings in this section will introduce the students to the high Indian civilization of Mexico that preceded the Spanish invasion, such as the Maya, Mixtec, Zapotec and Aztec. The instructor can select passages from works listed below that will accomplish the objective of enabling the student to understand and discuss the role of these pre-Hispanic influences in Mexican culture.

The Aztecs: People of the Sun, by Alfonso Caso
"2-rabbit, 7-wind"; Poems from Ancient Mexico, by
Toni de Gerez
Popol Vuh, by Goetz and Morley
The Book of Chilam Bayam of Chumayel, by Ralph L. Roys
Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico, by Miguel Leon-Portilla
Mexico before Cortes, Ignacio Bernal

Weeks 3 - 5 - The Conquest

The objectives of this section of the course are to enable students to understand the roots of the cultural shock experienced by the natives of New Spain, and to be able to discuss intelligently the changes and the losses that occurred to those societies. The students shall also become intelligently aware of the differing attitudes and range of sympathy expressed by the several authors. The readings in this section are very high quality historical prose works, and again, the instructor has a wide range of choice.

Bartolome de las Casas: A Selection of His Writings
Five Letters, 1519 - 1526, by Herman Cortes
The True History of the Conquest of New Spain, by
Bernal Diaz del Castillo
The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest
of Mexico, by Miguel Leon-Portilla

Weeks 6 - 7 - The 18th & 19th Centuries, Periods of Decadence and Independence

In the readings of this period the student will learn of the repressive and inhibiting effects caused by the weight of colonialism on Mexico. They will see the problems of Mexican culture during this period reflected in both the literature and, paradoxically, in the fact of the absence of more literary production than there is. The student will note the virtual eradication of pre-Hispanic influences in the writing of this period, and the slavish imitation of Spanish and European models. Attention will be drawn to the way in which Mexico along with the rest of the New World and other areas "discovered" by explorers of the 16th and 17th centuries, directed and stimulated the imagination of European writers, from Thomas Moore, through Voltaire, De Foe and Keats. Specific readings in this section can be selected from the following:

Antología by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz
The Itching Parrot, by Jose Joaquin Fernandez de Lizardi
Life in Mexico: The Letters of Fanny Calderon de la Barca,
by Howard Fisher and Marion Hall Fisher
Anthology of Mexican Poetry, by Octavio Paz

Weeks 8 - 12 - The Revolutionary Period

The student will see there the beginning of the growth of self-awareness in the Mexican culture. The political and social changes that were taking place in this period are reflected in the writings of the period, and the drama of the Mexican revolution provides material for writing from all over the world.

From within Mexico the student can see the first Mexican masterpiece novel, The Underdogs, and the experience of the Mexican peasant in the north can be seen in this book. The specific books recommended for this section are listed below:

The Underdogs, by Mariano Azuela
The Edge of the Storm, by Agustin Yanez
The Power and the Glory, by Graham Greene
The House on Bitterness Street, by Elizabeth Borton de Trevino
Anthology of Mexican Poetry, by Octavio Paz
The Great Science, Don Emilio Rabasa
The Shadow of the Candillo, by Martin Luís Guzmín

Weeks 13 - 18 - The Modern Age

The student will see in this period how Mexico reached a level of maturity in the modern world, and how its recognition as a unique and important culture continues to grow. There are works here that establish this clearly and effectively. At the same time the student sees in the literature of this period a re-examination of the cultural and political history of Mexico in an attempt to place modern Mexico in an accurate perspective. Works to be read here are the following:

The Death of Artemio Cruz, by Carlos Fuentes
March to Caobaland, by B. Traven
The Plumed Serpent, by D. H. Lawrence
Pedro Páramo, by Juan Rulfo
Recollections of Things to Come, by Elena Garro
The New Mexican Poetry, by Octavio Paz, et. al.
Anthology of Mexican Poetry, by Octavio Paz
Doors & Mirrors: Fiction & Poetry from Spanish America by Carpentier & Brof
The Night Visitor and other Stories, by B. Traven

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